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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of undergraduate teaching and research assistants in the Psychology Department of a university. This program creates additional resources for the department and provides mentoring opportunities for students who are interested in going to graduate school. Hiring and training undergraduates to be teaching assistants is cost effective as the number of students in each class section can be increased without needing additional adjunct faculty. Students interested in becoming teaching assistants must take a course titled "Psychology Applied to Teaching" before their placement. They are then mentored by individual faculty members. A student who has been a teaching assistant for at least one semester becomes the Head Teaching Assistant to work with the new assistants and to do some of the mentoring as well. The research assistant program relies on individual faculty members who are encouraged to involve undergraduates in their research. A list of some publications with which student teaching and research assistants have been associated is attached. (SLD)

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Utilizing Undergraduate Teaching Assistants: An Untapped Resource

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Indiana University East

Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology
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The Problem:

In this time of declining resources, it is tempting to adopt a mode of hiring freezes and budget cutbacks. Although faculty and staff are, indeed, being asked to do more with less, "cutting" is not the only method that can be used. The major problem may be not recognizing the resources we truly have.

The Solution:

The solution to the problem of dwindling resources is to find additional resources and/or use the resources we have more efficiently. It is our belief that undergraduate students, themselves, can be utilized as both new resources and for more efficient use of existing resources. Many undergraduate teaching institutions consider their students the customers being served. In comparison, many graduate programs consider graduate students to be both customers and resources for teaching and research.

Undergraduate students can serve as resources for enhancing the research and teaching environment of the campus. Our Psychology Department has taken the initiative to move qualified undergraduate psychology majors into teaching and research assistant positions. At the same time that this creates a pool of additional resources, it also provides strong mentoring opportunities for students who are interested in going to graduate school. As a result of this hiring of undergraduate students as teaching and research assistants, the productivity of our department has increased dramatically as has the number of declared psychology majors. In the past two years every student of ours who has served as an undergraduate teaching assistant and applied to graduate school has been accepted. Although there are many other factors that influence the acceptability of a student into a graduate program, serving as an undergraduate teaching assistant can set already successful students at a higher level.

Although hiring and training undergraduate students to be teaching assistants will require an expenditure of resources, the cost-benefit ratio is astounding. As we increase the number of students in each section and fewer sections are required (and fewer adjunct faculty are needed), we have channeled some of the savings into paying stipends for the assistants. Student response to this program and the assistants has been very favorable.

Changing the Way We Teach:

One method that is currently being considered is to move toward combined General Psychology Sections. Rather than teaching four or five sections of 50 students each, we are seriously considering offering one daytime and one evening section with up to 100 students each. Then, students would sign-up for a one hour lab time that would meet each week. The undergraduate teaching assistants would help the faculty member conduct each of these labs. The laboratory material, of course, would be directly linked to the course content for the week. We believe that these in-depth experiences will aid students to apply the concepts from the class, get more personalized mentoring, allow faculty members to get to know some of the students more closely, and maximize our resources.

Each faculty member might be responsible for two 25-student labs. In essence, the faculty member would have the same number of students as occurs now with the sections of 50. The difference would be, that more students would be in the content period, and smaller numbers would be worked with in what we are considering calling a "Critical Thinking and Reflection Lab".

The Teaching Assistant Program:

Students who are interested in becoming teaching assistants must take a course titled "Psychology Applied to Teaching" at least one semester prior to their placement. Individual students are then linked up with interested faculty and the mentoring shifts to the individual faculty.

Undergraduate teaching assistants work with the faculty to develop course assignments, in-class demonstrations and techniques, hold their own office hours and study sessions, and are required to teach at least one class period. This class period is observed by the faculty member teaching the course and feedback is provided to the student for further mentoring.

The campus has responded favorably to the development of this program and has supported the initiative with a line in the budget. The Chancellor has cited the possible positive impact on student retention and recruitment as reasons for supporting the program with funds.

What Student Teaching Assistants Do:

It is important to note that these students do not simply do "grunt" work. Faculty who utilize undergraduate teaching assistants are required to integrate the student into the development and teaching of the course. Although some faculty provide more support and opportunities for the assistants than others, the expectation that this is a strong mentoring relationship is clear.

The Head Teaching Assistant (a student who has served as a T.A. for at least one semester and received nomination for the Head position by his/her faculty mentor) works with the new group of T.A.'s and does some of the mentoring as well. In addition, the T.A.'s are required to complete a reflection journal at the end of each semester for which they have served as a T.A. These reflections focus on:

1.) What the T.A. did in that role for the semester (e.g., duties performed, assignments created, class periods taught)

2.) The T.A.'s perceptions of his or her impact on the students taking the course for which the T.A. served as a T.A. (results of duties performed, thoughts about the impact on particular students, views about the T.A. role)

3.) The T.A.'s perceptions of the impact the experience had on him or her (impact on self-concept, changes the experience might have led to in terms of career goals, perceived impact on the T.A. as a developing professional).

Teaching Assistants are are required to turn in a "Teaching Philosophy" as part of the Psychology Applied to Teaching Course that they must take prior to becoming a T.A. Anonymous sample philosophies from departmental faculty were provided to students as part of the mentoring process. Students were asked to reflect on:

1.) What does "good" teaching mean?

2.) What is the relationship between teacher and student?

3.) How can assessment of student learning lead to changes in how courses are taught?

The Research Assistant Program:

Faculty who wish to develop a research assistant program can do so in several ways. Many small grant opportunities will allow stipends to be paid for research assistantships. The psychology Department also has an Independent Study course that students can take called "Supervised Readings and Research". Students can serve as a research assistant for a particular faculty member and, with certain criteria for accomplishment, can receive course credit for their work.

When done properly, such a program can be a no-lose situation for all involved. Students are gaining valuable experience and may have research presentations and publications to show for their efforts. Faculty get dedicated students to enhance the productivity of their professional development efforts, and the institution is paid tuition dollars and may notice increased persistence and attainment of students.

Undergraduate Research Assistants are required to do develop several things as a result of this experience:

1.) These students must be directly involved in the development of the proposed project (this includes the design, preparation of the the institutional review board documents, data collection and analysis).

2.) It is expected that the resulting work will be written up in an APA style paper (it is further expected that this paper will be submitted for presentation at a student, regional, or national conference).

It is important to note that we are not really concerned here with whether that paper submission is accepted for presentation. We are concerned that the students go through the process of dissemination.

3.) A file of all student work generated through this program is kept.

Summary Vita of Professional Development With Students Serving in Our Undergraduate Teaching and Research Assistant Program

Scientific Journal Articles:

Elam, T., Osborne, R.E., & Norman, J. (in press). Conflicting self-tendencies: The role of self-esteem and self-monitoring in lying to others. Psi Chi Journal.

Osborne, R.E., Norman, J., Penticuff, J., & Robinson, M. (under review). I Think Therefore I Vote: Self-Monitoring and 1996 Presidential Voting Choices. Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science. (Peer Reviewed Journal)

Osborne, R.E., Finfrock, B.R., Weadick, K.M., & Samborsky, J.L. (1997). What You See Isn't Always What You Get: Individual Differences, Target Characteristics and Recovering From Biased First Impressions. Manuscript in Preparation.

Weadick, K.M., Osborne, R.E., Young, J.R., & Penticuff, J. (in press). Different I's of Different Beholders: Individual Differences in the Categorization of Self and Others. Psi Chi Journal.

Books:

Osborne, R.E., & Browne, W.F. & Fargo, K. (1997). A Critical Thinking and Study Guide to Acocmpany "Lifespan Development" by Helen Bee. Longman Publishers (formally Prentice-Hall).

Booklets, Chapters & Teaching Related Publications:

Osborne, R.E., Laws, J, & Weadick, K. (in press). The Costs & Benefits of Critical Thinking. American Psychological Association Activities Handbook, Vol. IV. (peer reviewed handbook).

Osborne, R.E., & Basford, T. (in press). Is it just me or is that guy crazy?: Demonstrating the importance of objective observation to psychology students. FACET: Quick Hits, Vol. 2. (peer review teaching handbook)

Osborne, R.E., & Norman, J. (in press). Helping Students to Understand the Cognitive Deficits of Attention Deficit Disorder. FACET: Quick Hits, Vol. 2. (peer reviewed teaching handbook).

Osborne, R.E., Penticuff, J., & Norman, J. (1997). Reality-Based Service-Learning: A Paradigm for Sustaining Momentum. Expanding Boundaries, Vol. 2. (peer reviewed journal).

Osborne, R.E., Weadick, K., & Penticuff, J. (in press). Service Learning: From Process to Impact. In R.G. Bringle & D.K. Duffy (Eds.), Collaborating with the community: Psychology and service-learning. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education. (peer reviewed book).

Osborne, R.E., Penticuff, J., & Weadick, K. (1996). Self-Esteem and the Educational Process: Helping "at-risk" Youth. Proteus: A Journal of Ideas (Special Issue on "At-Risk" Youth), Vol. 13, No. 2, 15-20. (peer reviewed journal).

Research/Professional Development Presentations (and Upcoming Presentations):

Osborne, R.E., & Samborsky, J.L. (1994). Hindsight Versus Second Sight: Need for Cognition and Recovering From Biased First Impressions. Paper Presented at the annual meeting of the MidWestern Psychological Association, May 1994.

Osborne, R.E., Finfrock, B.R., & Weadick, K.M. (1995). Mind Over Matter: IQ Versus Need for Cognition as Mediators of Recovery From Biased First Impressions. Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association Conference in Chicago, May 1995.

Osborne, R.E., Weadick, K.M., & Finfrock, B.R. (1995). The Complexities of Need for Cognition and Recovery From Biased First Impressions. Paper presented at the American Psychological Society Annual Conference in New York, June 1995.

Osborne, R.E., Weadick, K.M., & Penticuff, J. (1996). Heard Any Good Ones Lately?: Self-Monitoring and Memory for Auditory Information About Others. Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association Conference in Chicago, May 1996.

Osborne, R.E., & Weadick, K.M. (1996). The Interaction-Preparation Conflict: Anticipated Interactions With "Marked" Others Prevent Recovery From Bias. Paper Presentated at the 8th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society in San Francisco California, July 1996.

Osborne, R.E., Finfrock, B.R., & Weadick, K.M. (1996). The Effects of Motivation and Need for Cognition on Recovery From Biased First Impressions. Paper Presented at the XXVI International Congress of Psychology in Montreal Canada, August 1996.

Osborne, R.E., Penticuff, J. & Norman, J. (1996). Predicting Student Perception's of "Foreign"Words: The Role of Self-Monitoring and Self-Esteem. Presentated at the Annual Meeting of the Indiana Academy of Science at Depauw University, November 1996.

L. Lamb, & Osborne, R.E. (1996). Using Adult Attention Deficit Disorder as a Force for Positive Change in Life. Presented at the National Mental Health Consumers' Conference in Orlando Florida, December 1996.

Teaching & Technique Presentations:

Osborne, R.E., Laws, J., & Weadick, K.M. (1996). Using Bloom's Cognitive Objectives to Teach Critical Thinking. Invited Workshop presented at the 10th Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology: Ideas & Innovations in New York, March 1996.

Osborne, R.E., Weadick, K., Laws, J., & Mantooth, V. (1996). Teaching Critical Thinking: A Method and a Model. Invited Workshop presented at NorthHampton Community College in Allentown Pennsylvania, March 1996.

Osborne, R.E., Weadick, K., Laws, J., & Mantooth, V. (1996). The Costs and Benefits of Critical Thinking. Presented at the CTUP Creative Classroom Session of the Midwestern Psychological Association in Chicago, May 1996.

Osborne, R.E. & Weadick, K.M. (1996). How to Develop Critical thinking in General Psychology Courses. Session presented at the Third Annual American Psychological Association Institute on the Teaching of Psychology in San Francisco, June 1996.

Osborne, R.E., & Norman, J. (1997). So What's the Big Deal: Helping Students Understand the Impact of Disorders. Presentation for the Midwest Institute for Teaching of Psychology in Glen Ellyn, IL, February 1997.

Osborne, R.E., Norman, J., & Penticuff, J. (1997). Critical Thinking as a Teaching Model. Invited presentation for the Midwest Institute for Teaching of Psychology in Glen Ellyn, IL, February 1997.

Osborne, R.E., Norman, J., & Basford, T. (1997). Utilizing Undergraduate Teaching & Research Assistants: An Untapped Resource. Presentation for the 11th Annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology: Ideas & Innovations in Ellenville New York, March 1997.

Osborne, R.E., & Penticuff, J. (1997). Service-Learning: Pedagogy or Philanthropy? Presentation for the Midwest Institute for Teaching of Psychology in Glen Ellyn, IL, Febrauary 1997.